

Golden Deer Habitat (Townships)	Year
26	1994
23	1998

Source: CWS Study

¶3. (SBU) U Myint Aung explained that the golden deer primarily face two problems: poaching and habitat destruction. Poaching occurs because the deer are a good source of meat in an area where people consider their cattle too valuable to eat; cattle are mostly used for labor, not food. There is also a market for golden deer products in China, where people buy antlers and bones to use in traditional medicines.

¶4. (SBU) By far the larger threat to the survival of the golden deer, observed U Myint Aung, is habitat destruction. In other studies that he conducted, deforestation occurred in the area at a rate of 4.8 percent annually from 1989 to 1992, and reduced to 1.9 percent annually from 2001 to 2005 only because there was very little forest left to destroy. He said that a significant contributor to forest and agricultural land destruction now was the construction of hydropower projects in Central Burma. We observed a dam under construction, extending several miles. When it is complete, it will destroy hundreds of acres of farmland, pastures, and forests, U Myint Aung said.

Annual Deforestation	Years
4.8 percent	1989 to 1992
5.6 percent	1992 to 2001
1.86 percent	2001 to 2005

Source: CWS Study

¶5. (SBU) Extensive deforestation has driven people to search
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for fuel wood within the wildlife sanctuary, said U Myint Aung. In a 2004 survey, 94 percent of villagers living around the CWS admitted that they went to the sanctuary to gather fuel wood on a regular basis, and 60 percent of the respondents said that they went there at least once a month. Others went into the sanctuary regularly to collect building materials, harvest mushrooms and other food products, and to allow their livestock to graze.

NGLA Addresses Supply and Demand Sides of the Problem

¶6. (C) Using funds from an Embassy small grant in three communities surrounding the CWS, the New Generation Library Association (NGLA) created community forests, distributed fuel-efficient stoves, and promoted clean-up and awareness campaigns. These activities created areas where villagers could harvest fuel wood in a sustainable manner and provided them with stoves that many of the villagers we spoke with said saved a significant amount of wood. In all three communities, U Myint Aung and other project coordinators required that every household contribute to the project by working in the community forest and helping to clean up litter in their villages. Many villagers also brought their children to participate. This way, argued U Myint Aung, villagers had a personal investment in the improvement of their communities and therefore an interest in continuing the positive changes in the long run.

¶7. (C) The heads of all three of the communities that we met said that the forestry aspect of the project was the most important. U Thein Win, chairman of Hle Bwe Village, said farmers feared that climate change from deforestation would affect the viability of their crops and were eager to do their part in slowing the problem. All three communities have applied for community forest certificates from the government. If approved, these certificates would last for 30 years. All three villages expect that they will receive

the certificates because the government required them to determine that the land they proposed to use was inadequate for any other purpose, such as agriculture, building, or grazing. NGLA organized tree planting in all three forests, where villagers could raise fuel wood trees such as mezali and export-quality sandalwood, among other species.

¶8. (C) In order to address the demand side of the fuel wood problem, NGLA in conjunction with the recipient communities, funded the purchase of fuel efficient stoves. These stoves cost around \$2 and significantly reduce the amount of wood that households consume. One woman we met in Hle Bwe Village said that she uses only half the amount of wood that she required previously. Villagers from the Phothazandaung community said that on average their fuel wood consumption has decreased by 75 percent.

¶9. (C) In the Hle Bwe and Chatthin Villages, NGLA conducted litter clean-up activities and established programs for villagers to come together a few times each month to dispose of accumulated trash. NGLA also posted signs to raise litter clean-up and forest preservation awareness. We spoke with several villagers in a market near one of the signs, all of whom understood that they should keep their communities clean and work to preserve the forests in their areas. One woman admitted that she could not read well, but still understood from others what the signs said.

The Next Steps

¶10. (C) NGLA recently received a second small grant from Embassy Rangoon. They will use the funding to conduct similar activities in other communities around the wildlife sanctuary. U Myint Aung told us that these communities have approached him of their own accord, because they had observed the positive changes in the three communities with which he has already worked. While the last grant went extremely well, he said that he will ask villagers to create long-term environment plans with clear goals and objectives. This way,

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he can ensure that the effects of his projects will continue to impact the communities for years to come.

¶11. (SBU) All three communities also said that they face water shortages every year during the dry season and requested that NGLA incorporate a solution into future projects. Most of the villagers obtain water through tube wells that barely reach the water table at 15 to 30 feet below the surface. U Thein Win showed us a new government-funded tube well that was approximately 260 feet deep and could have provided adequate water to the village. He explained, however, that the funds dried up before the government could buy a generator, which rendered the new well useless. Other villages in the area have similar wells, all of which lack generators.

Comment

¶12. (C) The project around the Chatthin Wildlife Sanctuary provides a prime example of how a small amount of money (\$7,500) can create a lasting positive impact on remote communities in Burma. These projects do make a difference, as seen by the interest among neighboring villages to join. The participation of all villagers, including children, ensures that community members understand their impact on the environment and why they have a stake in its preservation. It also brings communities together, helping them to take responsibility for their futures and to decide collectively how to solve a mutual problem. By supporting projects like this, we build the civil society a healthy democracy requires that the Burmese military tries to repress.

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